

# Adult Teacher Competencies Address Practice Improvement

*by Joe Mando*

The Adult Teacher Competencies are a matrix of 139 statements of specific teaching skills and abilities that have been identified as being germane to excellence. Because teachers of adults have different levels of skills and abilities, the competencies are divided by levels of experience. Teachers complete a self-assessment and, with a mentor, develop an action plan for improvement. The author, having been involved in the Adult Teacher Competencies project since its inception, describes how the competencies have been implemented with great benefit at the Erie Adult Learning Center.

*Joe Mando has been a teacher and supervisor at the Erie Adult Learning Center for the past 30 years.*

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The Pennsylvania ABLE Adult Teacher Competencies (ATC) were compiled to establish teaching standards for adult education instructors and assist them in self-improvement. The Adult Teacher Competencies address two of the Indicators of Program Quality established by the Bureau of ABLE in 1999:

- **Indicator 3.3:** Program leaders supervise and conduct regular performance appraisals with all staff, including volunteers.
- **Indicator 4.1:** Programs have well-trained administrators and practitioners who consistently demonstrate Pennsylvania's Adult Teacher Competencies.

In practice, the teacher competencies are a matrix of 139 statements of specific teaching skills and abilities that have been identified as being germane to excellence. Because teachers of adults have different levels of skills and abilities, the competencies are divided by levels of experience. Teachers complete a self-assessment and evaluate themselves according to their level and responsibility. Usually, another staff member, serving as a mentor, completes the evaluation for the instructor. They compare the results and agree on some areas for improvement. Together, they develop an action plan for improvement. The activities that result benefit both the instructor and the program.

Having been involved in the Adult Teacher Competencies project since its inception, I can report that we at the Erie Adult Learning Center have found it to be extremely beneficial for our staff and program. The self-evaluation instrument is a non-threatening method of addressing the issue of self-improvement with professionals. Our staff is a veteran group, with an average of 17 years of experience in adult education. They have embraced this project without reservation. All of our staff must attend at least 12 hours of professional development activities each year. Now there is a focus or direction behind each activity. Each staff member is self-directed in a personal plan of professional improvement with a mentor, a co-worker.

Our two newest participants last year are good examples of how successful this project can be. One of our teachers was unsure of her new role as a teacher of small groups of ABE/GED students and working one-on-one with special-needs clients. Brainstorming with her staff mentor, she developed an action plan. She felt if she could observe some experienced teachers and had an opportunity to talk to them, she could handle her new challenge. She visited three nearby programs (two of which were out of state) to observe their instructional techniques. She also attended a number of Dr. Richard Cooper's presentations on Learning Differences and watched his videos to gain insight in how to work with special-needs students. As a result, this teacher developed a portfolio of lessons she uses in her classroom and has gained a great deal of confidence in her new assignment.

For another member of our staff, a counselor, the Adult Teacher Competencies provided an exercise in expanding her role and influence beyond her job description. With our relatively small staff and large student enrollment, it is important that staff members be multidimensional. The counselor recognized that by taking on more responsibility, she would make herself more valuable. This year she has developed curriculum and taught a class in job preparation. She has written grant proposals as well as taught a GED writing class. In addition, she has taken an active role at our Career Link.

We have expanded the Adult Teacher Competencies project to include the entire staff and they are part of our Agency Professional Development Plan for the e-Quality program improvement project. We then try to link our individual staff member's improvement plans to areas of the program that need to be addressed. The Adult Teacher Competencies have given us the tools we need to do the job.

**For more information on the Adult Teacher Competencies, see ABLE site at [www.able.state.pa.us](http://www.able.state.pa.us) or go directly to the page on ATC at [www.able.state.pa.us/atc](http://www.able.state.pa.us/atc)**